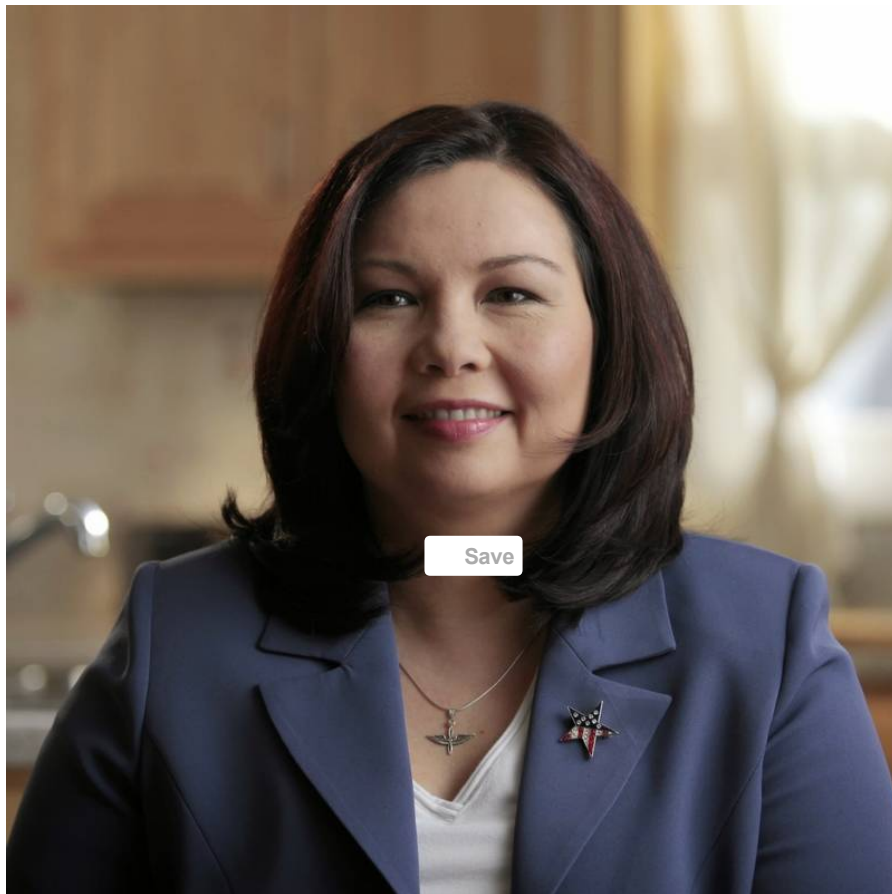


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Duckworth says she'd work with Trump on a 'decent' infrastructure plan



Tammy Duckworth



Marni Pyke

Trains, planes and buses weren't the only moving targets U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth and transportation leaders strategized over at a forum Monday.

There's also the X Factor of President Donald Trump, who's promised a \$1 trillion infrastructure program but hasn't released many details.

Although a Democrat, "I'm not from that part of the party that says they will not cooperate with (Trump)," Duckworth, of Hoffman Estates, said at a roundtable sponsored by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. "If he comes forward with a decent infrastructure package I'll work with him."

Transit leaders at the event lobbied for a steady source of federal grants.

Pace's expansion of bus service on I-90 is somewhat restricted by insufficient dollars, Chairman Richard Kwasneski said. "What's happening is that we need buses very quickly and that's our dilemma. If there was a new, consistent source of funding we could put those procurements out there," Kwasneski said.

Metra Executive Director Don Orseno said the agency was forced to cancel an order for railcars last year because expected government funding didn't materialize.

"We've got to find a way to get long-term sustainable funding," Orseno said.

Some attendees were dubious about one component of the president's plan involving public-private partnerships to build roads and other projects.

"It seems the plan is simply a massive 3-P program that lets billionaires invest in transportation infrastructure so they can make more money," said Democratic Illinois Sen. Martin Sandoval of Cicero, chairman of the state Senate Transportation Committee.

Public-private partnerships and tax credits are purported to be a big part of the \$1 trillion package, Duckworth said. "That can be part of it but it can't be the whole thing. No private entity is going to invest in fixing potholes and they're not going to invest in rural roads."

Illinois is a "donor state," paying more in federal taxes than it gets back. And some worry the situation could worsen under Trump.

Out of \$1.8 billion in recent federal transportation-related grants, the state received just \$36 million or 2 percent, said the Illinois Chamber of Commerce's Benjamin Brockschmidt.

That's shortsighted, Duckworth said, adding that a chronic freight train logjam in Chicago affects rail traffic across the U.S.

"What's happening here in Chicago is of national significance," she said.

Duckworth serves on the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and Environment and Public Works Committee.

She's spoken with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, who has promised a visit to the Chicago region.